

## **Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board Meetings Minutes**

### **February 9, 2009**

**Members:** Darian Unger, Alan Bowser, Kathy Stevens, Lucinda Lessley, Megan Moriarty, Victor Weissberg, Debbie Spielberg, Deborah Linn, Evan Glass, Phil Olivetti Marilyn Seitz and Mark Woodard, Mitch Warren and Mary Pat Spon

**Members Absence:** Cassandra Ford, Fran Rothstein, Tiffany Graham-Golden

**Guest:** Bob Colvin, Karen Roper, Jonathan Elkind, Jennifer Nettles, Jean Cavanaugh, Christine Arnold-Lourie, Jonathan Jay and Adam Daniel and Jason Tomassini

Call to Order and Introduction: Darian Unger, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. members and attendees introduced themselves.

**Approval of Minutes:** The Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board did not vote to approve the January 2009 minutes.

#### **Community Comments:**

- Bob Colvin distributed the ESSCA newsletter and stated that their Association wrote a letter to Mr. Cassidy, Department of Transportation, regarding concerns about the abandonment of public alleys in Parking Lot 3 and the lost of parking while construction is going on and after it is done.
- Stephanie Subramanian, distributed information from the Montgomery County Public Libraries Disability Resource Center Library Committee in support of the pedestrian bridge between the new Silver Spring Library and the Wayne Avenue garage. They urge that the bridge be covered, enclosed and easily reached from street level at both ends and suggest that the pedestrian bridge at Rockville Metro Station is a good example. Accessibility must include the route between car and building! The lack of a bridge will not prevent disable persons from getting to the library but it ***will*** make getting to the library more of an effort.
- The Silver Spring Library Advisory Committee strongly supports the construction of a pedestrian bridge and their position is bolstered by the County;' recent traffic study recommending against a mid-block crosswalk on Wayne which had been proposed as an alternative to the bridge, and by the projected high cost of underground parking. The bridge would be necessary for the safe and convenient access of many patrons – disabled individuals with diverse needs, the elderly whose walking pace is not compatible with the timing WALK signals; and those with young children in strollers or preschoolers with more physical speed than wisdom. It may even be a welcome option for many able-bodied but time constrained residents doing multiple errands. *(For complete detailed comments please refer to handout)*

#### **Chairs Report**

Darian Unger reported that:

- In addition to the regular packet three others documents have been distributed, the Department Transportation report on the mid-block crossing study, pros and cons of different arguments and other statement from the community about the library.
  1. The Chair and Co-Chair of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board, Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee and Transportation Management District Advisory Committee met with the County Executive to discuss the FY10 Operating Budget priorities. I brought up the subject of proportionality because there is a question as to whether or not Silver Spring budget cuts would be more than Bethesda. The County Executive suggested there could be some MCP stat meetings here with the community instead of Rockville during the weekday. County Stat is the County's way of tracking things like pedestrian incidents and mapping it. We receive some reports in the Transportation and Pedestrian Safety Committee and it is used to decide where they put resources.
  2. This was Debbie Spielberg's last formal meeting as a member of the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board after 6 years. On behalf of the Board and community thanks for your participation and they presented Debbie with a token of appreciation gift.

### **Outreach Committee**

Kathy Stevens reported that:

- The Outreach Committee is preparing to sunset by June 1. Victor Weissberg, Lucinda Lessley, Megan Moriarty, Dwayne Jenkins, Vicki Lockerman and I have had several meetings and the three point plan is as follows:
  1. Working on updating the Board's portion of the website. We invited community comments and received feedback. We reviewed other County websites to see if we could piggyback and not re-invent the wheel. Victor and I are drafting the website layout, Dwayne and Vicki will schedule a meeting with County technical webmaster early in March.
  2. Lucinda Lessley has drafted the text for a brochure to explain what the Board is, who we are, what we do and kind of an invitation to be involved. The Committee is trying to incorporate the Annual Report and brochure into these updates
  3. Megan Moriarty is compiling a list of approximately ten community organizations that the Committee wants to target and invite to a Board meeting. We will be happy to take suggestion of other organizations that folks think would be important to invite.

### **Director Report**

- Gary Stith announced he would be leaving Silver Spring Regional Center on February 26 and accepted a position in the Department of General Services in charge of planning and special projects for the County.

### **Discussion on Naming of Civic Building**

Chuck Short reported that:

- There has been discussion regarding the naming of the Silver Spring Civic Building and the name that came up was James P. Gleason who was elected the first Montgomery County Executive and served two terms (1970-1978). James Gleason was a courageous creator of our Executive form of Government in Montgomery County, originator and founder of the Regional Service Center System and a Veteran of World II. For these reasons there is thought about naming the building after Jim Gleason. Before continuing the discussion or going through the formal recommendation process we wanted to invite community feedback. The process is a formal recommendation to name the building after an elected official can be made by anyone in

the county. The County Executive is responsible for creating a naming committee with individuals and stakeholders.

- Alan Bowser commented that a decision to name the Silver Spring Civic Building need not be rushed. Neighbors in the Park Hills area think the building should be named after Doug Duncan because they associate him with the revitalization of downtown Silver Spring and have started a petition. The point I want to request be researched is that evidently Frank Hewitt's name was attached to the demolished Armory and he was the Second Postmaster of Silver Spring and involved in the early development of this area. If there was a name attached some due diligence should go into figuring out if this is true. His son told me the Armory was named after Frank Hewitt and that several sons had served in the United States Military so there is a Veterans connection with the Hewitt family.

## **Committee Report**

### **Transportation and Pedestrian Safety Committee**

- Darian Unger reported that they did not meet due to inclement weather. The next meeting will be February 25, 2009.

### **Neighborhoods Committee**

Kathy Stevens Reported that:

- The Neighborhoods Committee met January 16 and, notes are on pages 13 and 14 of the packet.
- Victor Salazar gave a presentation on the North West Park –Oakview Weed and Seed program and the three budget priorities from the steering committee. They are as follows: maximize law enforcement and community policing efforts; provide safe, secure, healthy living environments; preserve community-based services for youth and families.
- Tony Hausner gave an update on the planning for Prezco's crime prevention summit. There was a meeting on February 3 and he presented data and statistics and has scheduled a meeting with Maura Lynch, State's Attorneys Office to help refine the data as they go through the next planning process.
- Action Planning Updates in the community are: Ana Puentes, Alev Akbulut and Kusum Purohit presented their collective ideas that emerged after meeting at the Silver Spring Action Event in January. They are invested in helping small businesses in Silver Spring by improving their customer service, appearance and branding.
- Youth Action Planning meeting was held in December and Megan Morarity and Dwayne Jenkins agreed at the meeting to follow-up and discuss the idea of integrating youth voice into the SSCAB and Neighborhoods Committee.
- Downtown Together is a separate group involved with the Youth Action Planning meeting. The Downtown Together information is being consolidated and there is nothing written from the Youth Action Planning meeting.
- Evan Glass commented these were breakout groups that Marilyn Seitz and myself were part of. We had a meeting last week to discuss a more interactive Ellsworth Drive with older residents, adults and youth and we are in the concept phase.

*Next Neighborhood Committee meeting is Wednesday, February 23, 7:00 p.m. at the Silver Spring Regional Center.*

### **Commercial Economic Committee**

Phil Olivetti reported that:

- The CED Committee met January 21 and the notes start on page 16 of the packet. The main topic of discussion at the meeting was the pedestrian bridge from the Wayne Avenue Garage to the new Silver Spring Library and the CED Committee voted **not** to support the library bridge because it reduces the amount of street level activity and the increased cost. The Committee requested further study of an enhanced pedestrian level crossing.

Gary Stith distributed and gave a summary of the Department Public Works and Transportation, Division of Operations Traffic Study as follows:

- The County Executive recommended the library site be at the corner of Wayne and Fenton and the residential be on Bonifant to include a bridge connecting Wayne Avenue Garage over to the library. The HHS Committee agreed but asked the Department of Transportation for an evaluation of a potential mid-block crossing from the garage directly across to the new library. The elevator tower is on the corner of the garage on the fourth level and the bridge would come directly across Wayne Avenue into the library. The purple line is cutting through the site and the library is elevated over the top of the purple line station. The first two floors will be an arts use and center, the third, fourth and fifth floors will be library functions.
- The Department of Transportation evaluated the mid-block crossing and there is 125 feet from the intersection to the mid-block crossing. According to design standards used by traffic engineers the 125 feet is too close to the intersection to be functional. Park and Planning has done their staff report and agree that the mid-block crossing does not work. HHS Committee will review this on February 12.
- The Library Department compiled statistics and the current Silver Spring Library has 815,000 visits and they estimate an increase of about 38%. The Library Department feels the new Silver Spring Library will have approximately 1.1 million visits a year.
- There is a high concentration of people with disabilities and the new library will be a good location to have special software, other special equipment and collection for people with disabilities. 5% of users are elderly and there could be 400,000 thousand visits by people in these groups. The Silver Spring Urban District Advisory Committee took the position of being in favor of both improvements to pedestrian crossing at-grade level and the bridge.
- The Urban Renewal Plan lists specific streets and the streets that bound the parameter of urban renewal. The Plan states that there should be no overhead bridges over those streets. The City Place Mall Bridge was not included because it was built before 1992, when the Urban Renewal Plan did not exist.

### **Discussion**

- Alan Bowser commented that he is in favor of the pedestrian bridge and the community seems to strongly support the bridge. The part of Wayne Avenue being discussed is a dangerous stretch of road and of more concern is the pedestrian aspect of the entrance and exit to the Wayne Avenue garage. The purple line alignment proposed by the Governor comes down Bonifant Street diagonally across the site at-grade across Fenton Street which is dangerous. The purple line crossing the fifth stream of traffic will make it more hazardous and not to mention the garage coming out of the Crescent. The Library Advisory Committee, Disability Committee, mothers with tots and seniors are all in favor of the pedestrian bridge. If this Board recommends a street level crossing as opposed to the pedestrian bridge would be counter to what the County Executive recommended. There should be a location for people to drop-off disabled patrons at the library site which is not shown in the plan.
- Mitch Warren commented that numerous people with children in my neighborhood are not supporting the bridge and we wanted an urban area to have activity beyond Ellsworth Drive and to activate Fenton Village. I read an article by the Associated Press from 2006 that the elevated

skywalks that where once a popular urban fixtures are starting to come down because they take life off streets, are more dangerous and hamper the ability to bring successful retail and street life to urban streets and I hope we don't make the same mistake.

- Deborah Linn commented that the CED Committee voted against the bridge and she opposed the bridge and building the library in that location. The Board is struggling because whatever self selected group attends a meeting the vote is always different. Building in an urban environment means an urban library. The bridge will take activity off the street, is expensive and perhaps they can do something to improve the Fenton, Wayne crossing.
- Lucinda Lessley commented that the traffic study states "although clearly the safest from the standpoint of a eliminating conflict with traffic is our experience is that these facilities meaning the bridge are only effective when designed to provide access that is as convenience and if not more so to other alternatives." People look at pedestrian bridges as attractive and numerous people use it but the basic rule in planning particularly in transportation is pedestrian goes to the path of least resistance. Something must be done to improve the traffic on the corner and for the safety of pedestrian.
- Mary Pat Spon commented she supports the pedestrian bridge and works closely with the Steven Knolls School, and those students are teenagers and adults with disabilities and being able to access the library would be a great help to them. Cost is important, but the funds don't come from the operating budget but from the capital budget which is a separate entity funded over the long-term rather than an annually. For all these reasons it will not unduly limit the amount of traffic along Wayne and Fenton and having the pedestrian bridge will help to alleviate some of the additional traffic that will populate Fenton and Wayne intersection.
- Mark Woodard commented he wanted street traffic for retail but is not sure that the pedestrian bridge is an impediment. We heard this evening that visits to the new library should go up to 1.1 million and 400,000 thousand more or less is the vulnerable population that would benefit from a pedestrian bridge to make their access possible. If the library is successful with all the other things going on people will still come to downtown Silver Spring.
- Phil Olivetti commented people from South Silver, Fenton Village and other areas are going to visit the library. What's wrong with fixing the pedestrian linkages and sidewalks we currently have making them safe and more attractive for people to use rather than concentrate on a segment of the population that may or may not use the pedestrian bridge.
- Victor Weissberg commented the pedestrian interfaces can not be emphasis enough. We need to pay attention to the engineering and design options to get the entrance of the building closer to the intersection and everything possible to make it as inviting pedestrian interface on the sidewalks and to cross Wayne and Fenton.
- Marilyn Seitz commented we should try and get as much off of the intersection of Wayne and Fenton as we can. Place a curb drop-off and possibly some handicap parking on Bonifant so that we can decrease the bottle neck potentially at Wayne Avenue.
- John Marcolin commented that the Park and Planning staff recommended pedestrian safety improvements at the intersection of Wayne Avenue and Fenton Street to provide access to the proposed Silver Spring Library and the future Purple Line Station. The additional safety measures can be implemented in anticipation of the Purple Line would reduce costs, and provide a safe pedestrian crossing at grade for all users of the Silver Spring CBD.
- Evan Glass commented that the bridge is counter intuitive to the goals of the CED and Transportation and Pedestrian Safety Committees and we need to continue improvement on pedestrian safety efforts. We have made many strides where pedestrians can walk in safety but by declaring this area unsafe and unfit to walk neglects what has been done and does not provide enough foresight into what can be accomplished. On Bonifant where the escalator will most likely come up we need a curb there and on the first floor of the parking garage we can have

more accessible parking spaces for the disabled. We need to continue being creative in how to make streets safe for pedestrians.

- Darian Unger stated the note he received from HHS Committee staff seemed like probably no action would be taken at the February 12 meeting and Board opinion was welcomed. It could be informal from the material received from the community or if members want to make a motion we can vote. Through discussions this evening we are very far from community consensus on this. I suggest going with something informal so that I can talk to County staff about it to reflect basically this discussion we are having without a formal vote.
- Mitch Warren asked if a note could be written saying that the Board is concerned about the bridge not necessarily in opposition but the impact it would have on the continued redevelopment of downtown Silver Spring.
- Alan Bowser stated that the only thing that could be said is that the Board is split some are in favor of the bridge and others are not but everybody is in favor of doing something for a very dangerous intersection at Fenton and Wayne and bring in the other points about special facilities for people with disabilities and conclude by saying the bridge is a good solution for seniors, mothers with tots, and people with disabilities.
- Deborah Linn commented that everyone agrees we need to consider people with disabilities, seniors, pedestrian safety at all times but they should not look at the bridge as the only options because some people are in favor of it and while others are not.

Darian Unger proposed a default but if members want to propose a motion instead people are free to do that. I am inclined to try and do my best to reflect this conversation in an informal note to County Council staff. If we wanted to vote we could and too many peoples credit there has not been a motion to vote on the grounds it would probably take away a minority voice. Both sides of the story here are important.

**Motion:** (Stevens, Glass) the Silver Spring Citizens Advisory Board was divided and took no formal vote. For more complete detailed of this discussion please refer to page 3 of the CED Committee notes dated Feb.18, 2009

Meeting adjourned 9:00 p.m.

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